

Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers! 

Words Everywhere

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Preschoolers need to be exposed to lots of words and printed language to get them ready for reading and writing. Teachers can help by making environmental print a major part of their preschool students' classroom experience.

What is the practice?

Environmental print can include handwritten labels on furniture, walls, posters, and children's own scribbling or writing. Including environmental print in your classroom is most useful when it is read and "used" throughout the class's daily routine.



What does the practice look like?

A teacher writes down a story a small group of 4-year-olds dictates. He posts the story, along with the preschool students' drawings, on a bulletin board. The classroom's cubbies and hooks are labeled with the children's names and photos. The shelves are also labeled to help show where toys go. The teacher often refers to this print in the classroom by asking children to "find their names." He also provides opportunities for them to add to the printed messages around the room.

How do you do the practice?

There are lots of ways to include environmental print in your classroom. The main goal is to make it relevant. Use it as part of a daily routine to familiarize preschool children with all the uses of print.

- Start with children's names, which are often the first words they are interested in and can point out. Label cubbies, tables and coat hooks. Encourage children to use these labels as models when writing their names on their own work.
- To show the value of environmental print, refer to it. Take the time to point out posters with learning center labels, and handwritten or typed labels on shelves. For instance, when it is cleanup time, say, "Please put the blocks where it says 'blocks,' on the second shelf." During free play, say "Let's go sit in the 'Reading Corner' to look at this book."
- Encourage children to add to the environmental print themselves. Let them scribble or write stories, write their names on their work, and create classroom decorations for special events.
- Use environmental print during group time by pointing out the words on posters showing songs you're singing. Write discussion words on a whiteboard or large pad. Refer to these words when you use them in conversation or future lessons.
- Create a bulletin board of labels and logos. Ask children to find and bring in logos from places they like to go, like pizza places and local fun spots. Children often are able to point out labels and logos before they can actually 'read' the words. They learn to connect the words in the logos to the place or object itself. This helps focus their attention on characteristics of letters and words.
- Use stop signs and street signs in the blocks area. It's an easy way to include environmental print in children's play. The iconic nature of these signs, such as red, eight-sided "STOP" signs, makes them easy for children to identify.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do children in your class attend to environmental print?
- Are they learning to recognize more words and symbols?
- Do they understand the uses of environmental print?

Take a look at more words everywhere

Focus on Print

Noelle's preschool students have helped create their own literacy-rich classroom environment. Noelle invites the 4-year-olds to bring in pictures from magazines, food and drink labels, and other kinds of environmental print. The children pick their favorites for a rotating bulletin board of labels and signs. They refer to the display at group time. Pictures of signs from the neighborhood, magazine print, etc. are displayed around the classroom where they make sense. Street-sign pictures are in the blocks center and a photo of their public library sign is in the book center. This project has helped the students in Noelle's care focus on print even when they are not in the classroom.



Growing Confidence

In Marco's 3-year-old class, he makes a regular effort to engage his children in creating environmental print for the classroom. He helps them to write or scribble their names on their own work. He provides letter stamps, stickers, and sponges for the children to use to create artwork with letters and words. For special occasions, Marco will often write a simple message like "Happy birthday!" on a large piece of paper. When the class receives a new student, Marco makes a sign that reads, "Welcome to our class!" He will have the children decorate the paper while talking about the words and letters and what they convey. The children in Marco's class enjoy these activities. Their confidence in themselves as writers has grown!

Wonderful Word Walks

Every week, Sarah takes her inclusive preschool class on a "Word Walk" in the school's rural setting. Some children walk holding hands with each other or the teachers. Others who have limited mobility ride in wagons or wheelchairs. The goal of the walk is to notice all the words they can find. Some of the children "write" the words down on their clipboards using scribbling and invented spelling. A few of the students are able to sign the words while Sarah records with her camcorder. Some of the students speak words into audio recorders to remember for later. The words can be on signs, buildings, even trash. Once they get back to their room, the children become excited for what comes next! They add the words they collect each week to their ongoing list of words they've seen outside.

